



*Econ Journal Watch,  
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## CORRESPONDENCE

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Editors,

This journal has published research that describes some of the practices of Thomson ISI in producing the Social Science Citation Index (click [here](#) for an article from the April 2004 issue). As noted there, one of the important issues in producing the index is using citation activity as a criterion for journal inclusion. The primary issue I wish to highlight is as follows: If the journal belongs to a cluster of related journals that cite each other, the citation criterion becomes indeterminate, in that if the leading journals of the cluster are all included, then they all meet the criterion, but if only one journal (whether at the intensive or extensive margin) is held to that criterion, it may fail the criterion. A more meaningful citation criterion would be one that applied to entire clusters of journals that stood or fell together. To apply such a criterion, the editors of journals in question, presumably, would submit their own within-cluster citation activity—a task that would be manageable and very much in their interest to do. It may well be that at present the index includes some clusters and excludes others, without there being any cluster-level citation criterion that would discriminate between those that are in and those that are out.

Readers of this journal might wish to know about such issues as they relate to the history of economics. Here I provide the text of a letter that I drafted, but which was later modified, and shortened, and then sent over the signatures of the members of the Executive Committee of the History of Economics Society this past August 2005 to Thompson ISI, publishers of the Social Sciences Citation Index.

Dear Mr. [redacted],

In April of this year, the editors of *History of Political Economy* (HOPE) were informed by a concerned colleague

that the journal had been dropped from the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). A May 4 e-mail message from you to the editors confirmed that that was indeed the case. Naturally, the editors are eager to be restored to the SSCI and are confident they have a strong case.

We are the officers of the History of Economics Society, outside of Japan the oldest organization in this scholarly discipline. We know that *HOPE* is the longest-running journal in the subfield of economics known as the history of economic thought. In the judgment of nearly all historians of economics, it is the leading journal in the field. The first issue was published in 1969, and the journal has been continuously published since then. Each annual volume of *HOPE* contains four regular issues of 200 pages plus one supplemental book-length issue that is published in hardback; the supplement contains the proceedings from an international conference *HOPE* organizes each year. *HOPE* is published by Duke University Press, which is widely regarded as one of the very finest scholarly presses in the world. *HOPE* averages one thousand subscribers a year—a not insignificant number for a scholarly journal devoted to a subfield.

In your e-mail of May 4, you offer to the editors that *HOPE* might have been dropped from the SSCI because of a "low citation activity." If that is indeed the case, it is likely true for the simple reason that the SSCI does not index other journals in the history of economic thought—the journals that are most likely to cite *HOPE* articles. Two of those journals are the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (*JHET*) and the *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* (*EJHET*). To cite some numbers to support this claim, in the 2004 volume of *JHET*, there were 31 citations to articles in *HOPE*; in the 2004 volume of *EJHET*, there were 23 citations to *HOPE* articles. Those two journals, along with *HOPE*, constitute the core journals in the field, and, as such, all three should be indexed by the SSCI.

There is a danger to all historians of economics in the SSCI's practice of using citations to *HOPE* alone as an index of "activity", as you are of course aware. The field of the history of economics is defined in the American Economic Association's *Journal of Economic Literature* Classification system as "Bxxx" and is thus one of the main subfields of the profession. Very few general interest journals in economics these days publish history of economics papers, regarding that field as one in which the "field" journals are the normal outlet for scholarly work. The field journals are in fact many, with the core international ones like *HOPE*, *JHET*, and *EJHET*, and then the national ones like those published in Italy, Japan, Australia, England, and elsewhere. This field is well organized, and scholars in it publish frequently and cite one another's work. If though only one journal had been in SSCI (*HOPE*), it was unlikely that its citation count would be high. If the top three were in SSCI, the results would be quite different.

For our subdiscipline, the matter is a serious one. Various government agencies, like those responsible for determining research funding in a number of countries, look at citation studies as one measure of productivity. We scholars in the history of economics are now defined on that measure as absolutely non-productive! As officers in the History of Economics Society, with 300 members in total (180 in the US and Canada, and 120 in other countries), linked by a web-list of over 800 members in 40 countries, we want you to be aware of our concerns.

Subsequently, the editor of the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, the editors of the *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, and the officers of the European Society for History of Economic Thought sent letters to Thompson ISI. Discussion of these matters can be found in the Archive of HES-LIST at <http://eh.net/pipermail/hes/> for July, August and September 2005. There was also a short article on this matter by David

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Glenn in the “Hot Type” column of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for September 2, 2005.

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